

Church Disaster Mental Health Project *E-Newsletter*

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Volume 1, Issue

Special Interest Articles:

- Pastoral Care Skills Development Conference
- Spotlight on Resources: The Disaster Response Network
- Participate in Research
- Share your sermons, stories, and photos.

***Introduction:* The Church Disaster Mental Health Project: A Gulf Coast Training Network**

Welcome to the first edition of the Church Disaster Mental Health Project E-Newsletter! The purpose of the *Church Disaster Mental Health Project: A Gulf Region Training Network* (CDMHP) is to provide active outreach and education on disaster mental health topics to pastors and church leaders located in the Mississippi Gulf Region, with an emphasis on reaching pastors and church leaders from African-American churches. This education/community outreach grant is being led by Dr. Jamie D. Aten at the University of Southern Mississippi. The project is being funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts in collaboration with the Rand Gulf States Policy Institute. In collaboration with Reverend Beverly Wallace of Lutheran Disaster Response, Dr. Barry Click of Samaritan Counseling Services, and Dr. Alice Graham of Hood Theological Seminary and the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, Dr. Aten and the CDMHP co-sponsored the Pastoral Care Skills Development Conference in Gulfport, Mississippi on October 2, 2007. There were 39 participants in attendance at the conference.

The conference began with a breakfast for African American Clergy where Dr. Aten presented a research paper on *The Role of the*

African American Church in Overcoming Rural Mental Health Disparities, a study conducted with Dr. Sharon Topping of the University of Southern Mississippi and funded by the UMMC's Mississippi Institute for Improvement of Geographic Minority Health which is supported by DHHS's Office of Minority Health.

The breakfast was followed by a keynote presentation from Dr. Pauline Boss, professor emerita of the University of Minnesota. Dr. Boss spoke to participants about the effects and responses to ambiguous loss based on her research and clinical work following the civil war in Kosovo and terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers in New York City. She also shared helping strategies for addressing ambiguous loss following Hurricane Katrina based on her books *Loss, Trauma, and Resilience* and *Ambiguous Loss*.

A workshop on assessing depression and referral skills was given by Dr. Milton Kliesch, pastoral counselor and pastor of Osyka Baptist Church in Osyka, Mississippi. After lunch, Dr. Barry Click, director and pastoral counselor of the Samaritan Center in Jackson, Mississippi, presented a workshop on helping families and couples. Each workshop was very "hands-on," experiential, and discussion

focused. More workshops and conferences are currently in preparation, so keep a look out for upcoming training events.

Likewise, the CDMHP is drawing nearer to launching a website for pastors and religious leaders. Resources have been provided from colleagues across the country or from sites on the internet open to public domain. The website will give users access to approximately 118 disaster related links (e.g., faith-based disaster relief organizations and agencies), 70 power point online training modules (e.g., *Religious Communities Response to Disasters* by Harold Koenig, M.D.), 60 fact sheets (e.g., *Recognizing Burnout*), 36 manuals (e.g., *Church Preparedness Manual* by the Southern Baptist Convention), 29 titles and links to purchasing disaster and crisis related books (e.g., *The New Guide to Crisis & Trauma Counseling* by H. Norman Wright). The materials have been sent to a web developer who is currently working on designing the website. We will let you know when it is up and running.

***Spotlight on Resources:* The Disaster Response Network**



The Disaster Response Network (DRN) of the Mississippi Psychological Association is a group of psychologists who have agreed to volunteer time to provide pro bono disaster mental health and behavioral services in response to disasters, both man-made and natural. In addition to being licensed psychologists in Mississippi, DRN members have additional training in disaster mental health and behavioral intervention services.

DRN Volunteers work within existing disaster response agencies and organizations, especially with the American Red Cross, and seek to partner with other responder groups, but may also respond independently to disaster situations.

DRN Volunteers use their professional judgment and training to help disaster survivors, emergency and recovery responders cope with the extremely stressful and often tragic circumstances associated with disasters.

DRN members help problem-solve, make appropriate referrals to community resources, advocate for workers' and survivors' needs, and provide helpful information. They also focus on providing general emotional and psycho-educational support, helping people to marshal their own resources and to maximize successful resiliency skills.

DRN Volunteers are not available for ongoing, more traditional mental health care but will make

an effort to assist individuals in acquiring such treatment, when such seems required and as community resources are available.

As part of disaster preparedness, or following disaster, agencies and organizations may request DRN volunteers by contacting the Mississippi Psychological Association, the Regional or State-Wide DRN Coordinator identified below:

DRN Coordinator

Bill Martin, Ph D
(228) 818-9463
AtEaseMartin@cableone.net

MS Psychological Association

Tracey Curtis, Executive Director

[\(mpassoc@comcast.net\)](mailto:mpassoc@comcast.net)



***Spotlight on Research:* Participate in Study**

The CDMHP is currently looking to identify African American churches to participate in the following study: *The Role of the African American Church and Religiousness in Overcoming Long-Term Disaster Responses*. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding into how religious coping and support have helped people adjust following Hurricane Katrina.

The confidentiality of participants and churches who participate will be protected, that is none of the names of participants or churches will be released. It is our hope that our research will help churches become more aware of what needs exist in their congregations. Likewise, we hope that we will be able to publish and present our research in professional journals and conferences to raise awareness about the important role African

American churches in overcoming disaster mental health disparities. Finally, this research will be used to help us in our attempts to seek additional funding to keep and grow this project. **If you are interested in having your church participate in this study, please contact Dr. Aten at Jamie.Aten@usm.edu or 601-266-6246.**

Church Disaster Mental Health Project

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***Upcoming News & Events:* Disaster Resource Website**

The Church Disaster Mental Health Project website is coming soon which is being designed to be a resource center for those who help others. The website will offer inspirational

information on disaster preparedness, mental health topics, upcoming conferences for clergy members, information about disaster teams and how they can be contacted.

The website will also provide links to faith based disaster organization and national disaster teams that offer step-by-step preparedness and recovery information.

***Resource Sharing:* Looking for Katrina Sermons, Stories, & Photos**

If you have something to share that relates to your community's experience with Hurricane Katrina or disaster preparedness that may be helpful to others, let us know. We are especially looking for post-disaster sermons that you can share with other pastors. We are also seeking post- Katrina and post-recovery photos of churches, along with stories of your church's experiences with Hurricane Katrina. Let us know by emailing:
Jamie.Aten@usm.edu

What you send will be considered for this newsletter and for the Disaster Resource Website to serve as inspiration, guidance, and disaster planning resources.



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